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REFERENCES

ZHOU, Xiaojing, *Cities of Others. Reimagining Urban Spaces in Asian American Literature*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2014, 334 pages, ISBN 978-0-295-99403-1, $ 30.00

1 For readers acquainted with the field of Asian American studies, Xiaojing Zhou's name comes across as familiar, as she is the co-editor of one of the most pertinent critical anthologies published over the first decade of the 21st century—*Form and Transformation in Asian American literature*—engaging with Asian American writers' positioning in respect to Euroamerican literary traditions[1]. With this first book-length study on Asian American writings about Chinatown and about the city in general, Zhou sets out to interrogate interactions, encounters and transformations through a different lens, making a timely contribution to contemporary discussions on the representation of urban and national spaces. Articulating interdisciplinary frameworks of interpretation, "developed in both the humanities and social sciences" (12), she aims to scrutinize the "mutually constitutive and transformative relationship between Chinatown and Chinese American subjectivity, between the identities of Chinatown and the American city" (19). To sustain her arguments pointing to a necessity of critical examination of narrative embedding of the poetics and politics of space, Zhou deploys, in eight chapters, a study of selected works signed by both well-known and neglected contemporary and past writers.

2 Chapter 1, "'The Woman about Town': Transgressing Raced and Gendered Boundaries in Sui Sin Far's Writings", examines the ways in which Sui Sin Far / Edith Maude

Eaton's stories propose, as early as the end of the 19th century, subversive portrayals of urban spaces. Zhou claims that by refusing to privilege a "white gaze" (40), the Eurasian writer granted Chinese immigrants, as well as women, freedom of both perspective and movement, imposing the ethnic and gendered body as "part of the American cityscape" (56). Pursuing the scrutiny of classic texts, the second chapter, entitled "Claiming Right to the City", focuses on the first novel dealing with Chinese Americans living in New York City and its Chinatown—Lin Yutang's *Chinatown Family* (1948). Going against established readings depicting it as catering to a white readership, the critic argues that Lin's narrative strategies allow his characters to take possession of the city through everyday activities and interactions, undermining, like Sui Sin Far, the privileged notion of the white male *flâneur* (drawing on Walter Benjamin's conceptualizations) and challenging the myth of the self-enclosed ethnic enclave as well as that of the American city impervious to the presence of otherness.

3 The third chapter—"'Our Inside Story' of Chinatown"—focuses on Fae Myenne Ng's *Bone* (1993) which portrays the lives of several members, belonging to different real (and symbolic) generations of a working-class Chinese immigrant family residing in San Francisco's Chinatown. In a novel where, as Zhou astutely contends, space itself serves as the narrator, the reader's gaze is taken off touristic topographies "to expose and critique the legacy of racial exclusion and exploitation" (97). Inscribing this alternative reality of Chinatown as "habitation" (116), Ng's narrative is analyzed as making a case for the "mutually constitutive relationship of the social and the spatial" (116) as well as offering glimpses of limitations and possibilities entailed by this dynamic between space and subject. The examination, in the fourth chapter, of Frank Chin's writings, enables Zhou to take this idea further and dwell on "Chinatown as an embattled pedagogical space"—as phrased in the chapter title—, "at once the product and instrument of social power, a contested space of competing ideologies, discourses, and representations, which construct identities and constitute subjects" (117). She convincingly puts forward that rather than appearing as merely a background, Chinatown emerges here as a lively, productive and dissonant multicultural community, inventing itself through everyday practices and redefining, by its very existence, the American urban space.

4 Chapter 5, "Inhabiting the City as Exiles: Bienvenido N. Santos's *What the Hell for You Left Your Heart in San Francisco*", delves into the inscription, at the heart of the American city, of loss and dislocation resulting particularly from Spanish and American colonial legacies. According to Zhou, this 1987-published novel by the Filipino American writer departs from the main bulk of contemporary literature to deploy not only an aesthetics and politics of "mourning irretrievable loss" (197) but also of an "active engagement with the past" (196), allowing for limning modes of translational belonging.

5 Building on Mary Louise Pratt's concept of "contact zone" to refer to "how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (20), chapter 6 further explores hyphenated and postcolonial positionings transforming Western metropolises—as reflected in Meena Alexander's *Manhattan Music* (1997)—, to point out narrative strategies reimagining New York City as an "open, inclusive space of a diasporic world" (226). Zhou's choice of pursuing, in the following chapter of her book, the investigation of the racialized cityscape by choosing to probe Chang-rae Lee's *Native Speaker* (1995) presents her with the opportunity to eloquently argue for a narrative enactment of "interventional

possibilities for inhabiting the city not as a closed nation-space" (256) but rather as one of a more inclusive democracy and multiracial coalitions.

6 The final chapter, dedicated to the *Tropic of Orange* (1997) by Karen Tei Yamashita and the delineation of a global cartography of Los Angeles that relates it especially to the South, puts this novel forward as "show[ing] the spirit and possibilities" (289) for such a coalition; a narrative delving even deeper into the depths of "the politics of space in the era of economic restructuring and globalization" (21), it offers, as stated by Zhou, "an alternative mode of spatial practice and imagination" (262) that not only testifies to the "entanglement of vastly separated places and peoples" (262), but equally gives voice to "interracial community networks and transnational grassroots resistance to exploitation, subjugation, and exclusion" (262).

7 Having convincingly and innovatively taken the transnational dimension to the global South (when connections to Asia remain prevalent in critical examinations), Zhou concludes with the necessity to further open up conceptual frameworks and rethink critical tools to explore Asian American urban literature. The final pages of *Cities of Others* suggest directions for such redefinitions and expansions by taking up the study of Yamashita's latest novel—*I Hotel* (2010)—as well as of *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2004) by lê thi diem thúy. Both novels are seen as embedding in the American landscape and cityscape "visions and voices of those who refuse to be [...] made invisible" (298), reinforcing the critic's conviction that both imaginative and critical engagements have to move the focus from the global cities of the North to situate Asian American spatial experiences and representations in transnational and palimpsestic contexts.

8 With its meticulous, insightful and often refreshing readings and despite the occasional repetitions of the methodologies deployed (a consequence of organizing the book around particular works), Xiaojing Zhou's study not only engages but equally opens new investigatory trails. It represents an important contribution to the constantly growing body of critical works on Asian American literature and will prove of interest to theorists and scholars of American ethnic studies and American literature.

NOTES

1. Zhou, Xiaojing and Najmi, Samina, eds., *Form and Transformation in Asian American Literature*, Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2005.

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